

BIBLICAL CRITICISM AND PREACHING

BY
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A FOREWORD

THIS is primarily a message from a preacher to preachers. I do not profess to be an expert in the higher or any other sort of criticism, but am not without knowledge of the main conclusions of modern biblical scholarship. I am convinced that the Christian minister must take account of these results in the work of the pulpit, not so much as homiletical material as forming a new atmosphere in which his message is delivered. Ibsen puts a profound saying in the mouth of one of his characters: "The eye, born anew, transforms the old action." May I hope that the following brief study of the situation may prove a tonic to the timid and an anodyne to

the audacious? I trust it may also be of use in stilling the tumult in the minds and hearts of many perplexed but loyal laymen.

G. E.

BIBLICAL CRITICISM AND PREACHING

TRANSITION AND TRIAL

ALL times of theological transition are times of trial to the Church and of testing to its teaching, and in all such times the brunt of the battle must be borne by the Christian minister, for it is he who must bring the new truth to the touch of life. The final assay of the ore dug up by the scientific investigator in the mines of religious history must be made by the preacher. This is preëminently true of the problems raised by the critical reconstruction of biblical history and literature. How far has the message of the Bible become obsolete through the change of attitude as to its origin and structure? Has its spiritual force as an aid in right living been in any way

diminished? These are questions which the minister must meet, and upon his intelligent loyalty in answering them will depend the religious life of the Christian Church in the coming generation.

PREACHER AND PREACHING

Christian preaching is still the chief external source of religious knowledge to the people. The Bible itself is a means of grace most largely through the public proclamation of its message from the pulpit. As Coleridge states it: "The preacher is the point of junction between the spoken word and the Church, the sensible voice of the Holy Spirit."¹ He is "steward of the mysteries of God." The prevalence of the printed page has hardly lessened the power of uttered truth. It is still by the "foolishness of preaching" that God proposes to save man. Like the prophet of old, the preacher is God's

¹ Literary Remains (Notes on Donne).

spokesman, and the pulpit is the tribune from which the divine oracles are made known.

The Bible is therefore preëminently the preacher's book. It is in truth the literary prolongation of the prophetic vision and message and of the apostolic testimony and teaching. In their call and consecration he finds the genesis of his office, and the sermon is but the living continuation and development of the sacred message that they delivered. He must be so saturated with the contents and spirit of the Book that he shall become a living Bible. The ideal of the preacher is well portrayed in the words spoken by Lamartine of the young Bossuet: "The child became a prophet. Such he was born and such he was as he grew to manhood, lived and died, *the Bible transfused into a man.*"

The Christian preacher, however, exercises other functions than those of the Hebrew prophet. To the prophetic

office he must add the work of the teacher. He must be both seer and scholar. It is the separation of these functions made necessary by the growing complexity of truth and life which has in large measure created the antagonism between criticism and orthodoxy. Theoretical scholarship has been in part divorced from practical piety. The professor and the preacher see the truth of God from a very different standpoint. The Christian scholar has, indeed, a sacred ministry to perform, but it is one quite subordinate to the proclamation of the evangel of Christ. The aim of the student is truth for its own sake; the aim of the preacher is the realization of truth in personality. It will therefore be the preacher, and not the professor, who must say the final word; for the appeal to life, to spiritual reality, is the final test of truth itself. The pulpit and the chair need each other; the former needs to gain the courage and loyalty

to truth born of scientific method, and the latter the practical sense and vital atmosphere of the evangelistic passion. The battle will be over and peace will come when the preacher finds out that the results of critical study have a real value for life, and the professor that truth in its wholeness cannot be discovered or live in the intellectual vacuum from which the vital air of feeling has been pumped by the reason. The appeal to life will save the scholar from academic narrowness, and the scientific method will preserve the preacher from dogmatism.

THE CRISIS IS NOT NOVEL

There is really nothing novel in the situation. The Church has met similar crises again and again, and in every case has found the gain greater than the loss. She met the reflective thought of Greece and assimilated its philosophy into the great Catholic creeds; she met the institutional genius

of Rome and won from it an external organism by which she survived the political chaos of the Dark Ages; she met the humanism of the Renaissance and transformed its spirit into the Protestant Reformation; she met the invasion of physical science and found fresh illustration of spiritual truth. A little knowledge of religious history would serve to allay our alarm and to inspire courage in the present crisis.

The preacher, as Schiller says of the poet, should be the child, but not the slave, of his age. Because preaching is a message out of life and to life, he must be in touch with the time-spirit while he feels the breath of the Eternal Spirit. If he wants to make the Book of God live for modern uses, he must take counsel of all learning that throws any light upon its origin and structure or may find any fresh light in its message. It is a great joy to the true minister of the mysteries of God to breathe the stimulating air of an age

that analyzes rather than systematizes. Preaching has become a harder but more vital task; it is an adventure into an uncharted sea, full of possible peril, but also alive with the promise of fresh discovery, of new continents of truth rising out of the dangerous deep. He need not fear that any new realms added to human hope and experience will fail to inherit the wealth of the lands left behind in his journeying. He will, rather, realize Jesus's description of the scribe who is well instructed in the kingdom,¹ who knows how to give continuous life to both the new and the old, and who out of the inexhaustible treasure hoard of truth brings to his people new meanings in the old teaching, and shows the old life burgeoning and blossoming in the fresh beauty of new statement.

THE PERIL OF FREEDOM

The problem raised by the critical position is real, and must not be ig-

¹ Matt. 13. 52.

nored or denied. All freedom has its dangers. He who has confused his faith with ceremonialism will feel the foundations going when forms of worship are discarded, and those who have confounded trust in a living Person with acquiescence in a verbal formula may surrender their hope when the formulas are abandoned. These are dangers to weak and timid rather than to strong and brave souls. It needed all the logical genius and ethical enthusiasm of Paul to save his doctrine of justification from being the occasion of antinomian folly. But it must always be remembered that this panic and consequent peril have been chiefly created, not by the critics, but by their opponents, by a traditionalism which has produced a pattern of piety resting upon human opinion rather than upon the revelation of God. A religion had at second-hand through the medium of any visible authority must be shaken and fall

when its basis of authority is discredited. A devout but ignorant Romanist woman, who broke the china crucifix which she was accustomed to use in her devotions, cried in dismay, "Now I have nothing but the great God to trust in!" The relations of God to the soul of man must not be entangled with any human traditions or any external authority. The preacher or teacher who does this is worse than a bungler who daubs with untempered mortar in the building of character; he is a false prophet who has perverted the gospel by overlaying it with the traditions of men.

CRITIC AND DOGMATIST

But the critics themselves have not been without blame in this matter. They have not all been men of richly endowed spiritual natures. It is the unfortunate accident of history that this new intellectual discipline was exploited at the first by rationalistic

theologians, who corrupted critical methods by mixing with them uncritical presuppositions born of *a priori* speculative theories. Much of the mischief has been wrought by this mixture of philosophical with historical and literary criticism. In making this admission it must also be remembered that an uncritical dogmatism has itself been largely responsible for the creation of rationalism, and that the latter renders a real service when it aids in destroying an unspiritual traditionalism. The iconoclast is never wholly wise; he often destroys many a lovely form of the past which might well be spared. His hammer is apt to fall with little discrimination upon a hideous Mumbo Jumbo and a lovely Apollo Belvedere. Yet the work even of the negative critic may be of the highest value; such criticism is a cleansing fire which cannot but refine the gold of Divine Revelation while

consuming its dross. Just as proud Egypt endowed departing Israel with her wealth, so will even an undevout scholarship be compelled to put its treasures of learning at the service of supernatural religion. Criticism needs transplanting from the frigid climate where it has grown into the warmer region of evangelical faith. For its highest service it demands spiritual insight and sympathy, even as art criticism requires æsthetic feeling. Yet that artist would be very foolish who refused to learn from the professors of optics and acoustics on the ground that many of them had shown deficient perception of artistic beauty.

THE PREACHER'S DANGER

Here emerges a supreme danger of the preacher. He is rarely an expert in any one department of theological training. He is in peril of academic pedantry on the one hand and of shallow sciolism on the other. The

silly pretense of omniscience and intellectual superiority, the itch for novelty, and the longing to be hailed as an "advanced thinker," affectation of up-to-dateness and modernity, the premature exploitation of undigested erudition and unseasoned theories—these are some of the ways in which the pulpit has discredited the patient toil of the professor and aroused unworthy suspicion of the true spirit and character of the new learning. Nothing could be more sterile than such a ministry. As Hatch has shown, the modern preacher is too often the successor of the Greek sophist rather than of the New Testament prophet.¹ Such preachers pervert the very purpose of the pulpit. While the sermon must take cognizance of all science, real preaching is pre-scientific; like poetry and literature, it deals with concrete realities, not with intellectual formulas or logi-

¹ *Hibbert Lectures*, 1888, iv.

cal abstractions. To be instructive it must be constructive and not destructive. It has primarily to deal with spiritual certainties, not with critical negations or human opinions. To make the analysis of the Pentateuch, the partition of Isaiah, the date of Daniel, or the synoptic problem the theme of that piece of sacred rhetoric we call the sermon is to prostitute the positiveness of the prophetic message: the preacher has become a phonograph of earthly theories and is no longer the spokesman of the Eternal.

✓ The true work of the critical method, which is to free scholarship from dogmatism, has failed in such a minister; he is still the victim of the vicious intellectualism from which he imagines he has escaped.

THE RIGHTS OF IGNORANCE

Moreover, the minister's conscience is not scientific but pastoral. He has the care of souls and can never forget

the needs of his flock, the weak and timid as well as the strong and mature. He will never go out of his way to gratuitously insult a conventional belief. He knows that many institutions and ideas have won a sanctity by their association with the holiest experiences. He will not wantonly attack such reverences until he has given more worthy objects of devotion. He will not take away the cripple's crutches until he has taught him to walk without them. Nor will he resort to brutal methods to disillusion souls of their dear delusions. He will never, schoolboy-like, set off fireworks just to make a sensation and wake up folks. The Christian congregation is made up of a heterogeneous audience. There are the old, whose habits of thought are crystallized and cannot be broken up without much mental and moral distress; there are the young, who still need scholastic drill and are ill prepared for the subtleties

of science. It is a terrible thing to lose old reverence while new knowledge is being acquired. It is a delicate and difficult task to guide souls through times of transition and to save from wasting the wine of the kingdom while we are being compelled to change the pattern of the bottles!

Let knowledge grow from more to more,
But more of reverence in us dwell,
That mind and soul, according well,
May make one music as before.¹

This duty of caution and consideration for the rights of the unlearned involves a moral danger. Courage and candor are the very soul of the prophetic spirit, and they must not be killed by cowardly caution. The gravest suspicion in which the modern pulpit is involved is that of intellectual dishonesty. Care must be taken that the noble reticence of a loving tenderness for the timid is not mistaken for, or does not become, an

¹ Tennyson, "In Memoriam."

ignoble reserve as to the royalty of truth itself. Yet this caution is commanded by our very loyalty to truth; it is the very essence of the scientific spirit to combine caution with courage—caution in its method and courage in accepting the farthest consequences of that method. It is not dishonest to utter opinions with reserve and convictions with assurance; it is not uncandid to be silent about tentative conclusions which in the very nature of the case are subject to revision. We are to declare the whole counsel of God, but not necessarily the whole result of scholarship, and certainly not the detailed processes by which its positive results are reached. To bring the methods of the library and laboratory into the pulpit would painfully puzzle not only the weak brother, but also the strong folk of the congregation. The preacher will do well to have an efficient smoke-consumer on his thinking engine, lest

he suffocate with the rank vapor of his doubts. "Religion," says Carlyle, "is not a doubt; it is a certainty or else a mockery and a horror. None of all the many things we are in doubt about, and need to have demonstrated, and rendered probable, can by any alchemy be made a religion for us, but are, and must continue, a baleful, quiet or unquiet, hypocrisy for us."¹

THE RIGHTS OF INTELLIGENCE

The rights of the unlearned must not be so construed as to destroy the intellectual dignity of the pulpit. There is no alliance between faith and ignorance. Intelligent people are quite as well worth saving as fools and ignoramuses. The tragedy of the present situation is not only the panic that seizes the weak and timid, but the "horror of great darkness" which has come down upon many people of culture and thought. The weak

¹Life of John Sterling, Part I, Chap. XV.

brother must not so control the casuistry of the Christian conscience as to destroy that liberty in which alone noble natures can be nurtured. We must not, in consideration for frailty, persist in a policy that creates weaklings. The incapacity and unfaithfulness of teachers, which have produced spiritual parasitism, must give place to a ministry whose message shall impart a faith by which man can live first-hand from God. A New Testament advocate of religious progress has put the case in noble words of needed warning to those who persist in giving the milk of the primitive platitudes of piety to those who need strong meat—"the mature who by means of the spiritual gymnastic have gained critical insight into moral values."¹

Can a higher critic save souls? Certainly, if he has the evangelistic spirit. He cannot save them by

¹ Heb. 5. 12-14 (a free paraphrase).

higher criticism, no more than the theologian can save them by the science of dogmatics. But we certainly cannot save anyone through any protective policy of ignorance. If the Church would keep a good conscience, she must not only accept the assured results of biblical scholarship, but allow those results to form the intellectual atmosphere in which the gospel is proclaimed. In that atmosphere the men and women of our time are actually living. Our appeals to-day must be made to minds unlearned indeed in the details of the new teaching, but saturated with its spirit, often, unfortunately, in its most negative forms. There are many souls who can best be saved to the kingdom by the messenger who has mastered the critical method and results. John Wilhelm Rountree, the agnostic, testified to his conversion to Christianity through reading the writings of W. Robertson Smith, the prince of mod-

ern biblical critics. George James Romanes, shivering on the frigid boundary between pantheism and atheism, came to a humble Christian faith through the influence of John Gulick, the missionary, who was also a Darwinian evolutionist. Greater than either, Augustine of Hippo has recorded that profound experience of his in which his intellectual revolt at the difficulties and even seeming absurdities of the Scriptures was overcome only when the broad-minded and tolerant Ambrose showed him the spiritual sense, not "of the letter that killeth, but the spirit that giveth life."¹ If the great African bishop had in his hour of darkness fallen into the hands of a reactionary or obscurantist pastor, how different might have been all Christian history since! To expel science from Christian thinking is to try to drive the chariot of salvation on deflated, if not punctured,

¹ Confessions, Book VI, §6.

tires, and to be hopelessly outdistanced in the onward rush of things.

A NEGATIVE DUTY

One negative duty is imposed upon the preacher by the present situation. In intellectual honesty he must not use the pulpit to support untenable and discredited theories of Holy Scripture. The conservative minister, no more than the progressive, has the right to proclaim any human opinions as if they were the veritable truth of God. He must not use his office to disparage the work of devout scholars, nor to cruelly and falsely brand as heretics and infidels men whose loyalty to truth is born of their communion with God, and whose conception of that relationship is frequently more spiritual than his own. He must not disingenuously point out the disagreement of critics on uncertain and disputed matters and wholly ignore the vast range of conclusions

practically settled by the consensus of all experts. If he is a sincere man he will not seek to win the plaudits of uninstructed piety by the tricks of the demagogue and charlatan, or by passionate protestations of loyalty to the "dear old Book." Nothing has more dishonored the sacred records than the unworthy honor often shown them by men who are willing to pay them every possible respect except to really study them. The Bible has had to endure more at the hands of its supposed friends than from all its enemies. There is a subtle unbelief that underlies all these attempts to profanely steady the ark of God. There is a calm confidence which should possess the soul who has won spiritual certainty to which the froth and fury of partisan special pleading are utterly alien. That besetting vice of the oratorical temperament which makes the preacher a mere echo of popular prejudice must never be al-

lowed to stain the transparent candor of the true prophet of God.

THE DANGER OF DOGMATISM

Nothing is more fatal to the pulpit than the spirit of militant dogmatism; the temper of the literalist or of intellectualism is far away from that "sweet reasonableness" by which divine things insinuate themselves into the minds and hearts of men. All the hosts of doubt and denial are less dangerous to the cause of Christ than the traditionalism which has substituted its shriveled formulas for the truth of God. Many who hold these reactionary views are doubtless good and sincere men who verily think they are doing God service; but it sometimes requires the utmost effort of Christian charity to recognize any vital religious experience back of the intellect that can conceive or the tongue that can express such sentiments as "You must choose between Christ and the criticism," "If the

Bible is not infallible, it is worthless." How is it possible that any soul that has once caught a glimpse of the self-evidencing glory of the faith of Christ should be willing to stake all its excellence, beauty, and truth upon the question of the Mosaic authorship of the Levitical system in its completeness, or the historicity of every detail in the book of Chronicles? It is a shallow and unimaginative dogmatism, making itself the dry-nurse of skepticism. It would be easy to retort, if such persiflage is to be dignified as argument, "You must follow Christ rather than the Sanhedrin"—for it was the rabbinical school that formed the traditional idea of Scripture which many ignorantly confuse with the Word itself.

Here are some samples of the sort of thing which the preacher must avoid if he would not make skeptics by the score: "The affirmations of Scripture of all kinds, whether of spiritual doc-

trine or duty, or of physical or historical fact, or of psychological or philosophical principle, are without any error when the *ipsissima verba*¹ of the original autographs are ascertained and interpreted in their natural original sense. . . . A proved error in Scripture contradicts not only our doctrine, but the Scripture claims, and therefore its inspiration in making such claims."² Well did Richard Baxter say, in criticism of similar theological aberrations in his day, "The devil has always been a great undoer by overdoing." In the chilly air of such a sterile thought region sooner or later every flower of a true faith must droop and die. It is not in such pint-cups of doctrinal definition that men can catch and measure the tropic rains of God. It is not necessary to deny the service rendered in a former age by such inade-

¹ Evidently, God is not as much interested as these professors in the inerrancy of the "original autographs," or he would have providentially preserved them for us.

² Warfield and Hodge, *Presbyterian Review*, April, 1881.

quate and inaccurate formulas; they are the scholastic drill of infantile souls, the "beggarly elements" of an immature dispensation. Something of mother love a child may learn by playing with dolls; but the grown woman who has a living baby at her breast has laid aside the idols of her play days. She would lose the very love they taught if she now preferred them to the growing beauty of the child. As we shall see hereafter, there is an implicit rationalism in such statements which must give way to the religion of the spirit.

There should be warning to the ministry in the memory of the supposed conflict of a generation ago between natural science and revealed religion. Many preachers made the mistake of roundly denouncing from the pulpit the geologists who taught a greater antiquity of the earth and man than that allowed by the biblical chronology as interpreted by Arch-

bishop Usher, and the inclusion of man in the continuity of living organisms indicated by Darwinism. Then, later, others were led into the still more serious blunder of constructing elaborate harmonies of science and religion. Moses and the prophets were supposed to have anticipated Herschel, Lyall, Huxley, and Tyndall. By both the dogmatic denial and the absurd harmonizing the preacher abdicated his real throne of power and missed the meaning of Holy Writ. To say, as has been said so many times, that every latest discovery in physical science will finally be found in agreement with Scripture properly interpreted, is simply another way of saying that we theologians have become so clever in the manipulation of sacred texts that we shall find no trouble in adjusting the difficulties raised by any of its naïve, primitive statements to any discoveries made throughout the tides of time. This

wresting of Scripture in its defense will at last confuse the logic and callous the conscience, until the very temper to which truth is revealed is wholly lost. Some people are immune to dangerous microbes and can drink polluted water with impunity. So likewise many in our churches have taken little harm either from the belligerent blunder of antiquated ignorance or the insincere patchwork of would-be enlightenment; but who can doubt that the sense of unreality raised by both these thought-attitudes has done much to create religious indifference and even widespread skepticism? Sensitive spirits by the thousand have been poisoned by such pollution of the very springs of salvation.

POSITIVE GAINS TO FAITH

Already the Church is beginning to realize positive gains to faith from the new methods of biblical study. The

critic's rod has shattered the rock of traditional theories and already the waters of life are beginning to flow. Truth itself is a gain. In the words of the quaint and judicious Hooker: "That which is most truthful is also most behooveful." New power will come to the pulpit when its message is spoken in this new atmosphere of reality. If the center of gravity as to biblical inspiration has shifted from a mechanical to a dynamic theory, there can be no question that it is only a readjustment of ballast which will make the ship ride more steadily. Some men will feel it very hard to see a good sermon made useless because a popular exegesis is made impossible. But the Bible was not chiefly created to furnish texts for preachers nor proof-texts for theologians. The Church will be vastly profited if delivered from the atrocities of allegorical interpretation. When the distortions caused by a piecemeal use of

Scripture give place to a larger view, and preachers, no longer privileged misinterpreters, are held by the demands of a genuine grammatical and historical exegesis, a new respect will be generated for the Book of God.

There has already been realized a great gain in vividness. The Bible is most divine when most human. True Protestantism has humanism, and not scholasticism, in its veins, and feels most mightily the power of the appeal to life. After all, it is not so much confirmation of our faith that we should seek as for new views of truth that will vitalize it. The Bible has become a new book to many of us. Criticism has given life to an alien past. Above all men the preacher profits by possessing the historical imagination. The true Bible has power to speak across the ages, because it is not a ready-made code, like the Koran, but the truly human record of the ways of the Spirit. The

book is made to live for modern uses when its supernatural element is conceived, not as a philosophical puzzle, but as a vital power. Prophecy gains new meaning when, instead of being a collection of mysterious oracles or queer puzzles for modern guessing, it is seen as the living message of God filled men to their own time. Nothing has more quickened the preaching of applied Christianity than this new conception of prophecy as ethics applied to history. What divides the preacher from the people more than anything else is the academic spirit; he grows out of touch with life. A fresh bath in the living waters of a progressive revelation would wash the mind of the professional taint; religion would no longer be a bit of far-off moral archæology dugged up from the débris of centuries, but a present, living fact. The critic, with all his limitations, is often a juicier person than the dogmatist.

THE MORAL GAIN

There is also an ethical gain from the new attitude. If Scripture is no longer used to justify slavery, polygamy, and despotism; if the morals of a primitive age are no longer invested with a divine sanction and invoked to feed the fires of bigotry and intolerance; if judges do not now burn witches nor conquerors bear the sword of religious persecution in the name of Jehovah of Israel, a great and lasting gain has been realized. It may be said that those things have already passed away; but, if so, it is because the Bible has taught men better than their narrow theory of it would allow. Such is its inherent vitality that genuine nourishment for the soul has always been derived from it in spite of impossible mistranslations and preposterous exegesis. And here emerges a still higher moral advance for the pulpit message. The preacher has been delivered from the toils of

apologetic sophistry, from insincere harmonizing, and from conscience-deadening casuistry. He is no longer called to the defense of an obsolete morality or a worn-out social order. Indeed, the traditionalists themselves are already reaping this benefit. They themselves do not, with heroic loyalty to the letter of Scripture, condone polygamy, defend slavery, practice feet-washing, indulge in the holy kiss, teach the superior sanctity of celibacy, forbid a second marriage for bishops, or preach the social subjection of women. Even the literalist has quite ceased the futile effort of squaring his practice with the theoretical convictions of literal Bible-teaching. The moral battle will have been won when he attains an intellectual standpoint which will relieve him of this inconsistency. Criticism does consciously and with reason what piety has always done unconsciously and sometimes with much perplexity. The blessings

of Jesus have always superseded the curses of the psalmist in Christian morals. The enlightened conscience has always been a critic.

THE APOLOGETIC GAIN

The fresh moral orientation of Scripture through critical reconstruction is also an apologetic gain. A needless barrier to faith has been removed when the preacher no longer feels compelled to palliate or explain away ethical perversities or intellectual contradictions in the Holy Book. A rigid literalism and mechanicalism is helpless in the presence to a multitude of difficulties for which the traditional theories of composition and authorship furnish no explanation excepting forced and unnatural harmonies. It is often alleged by superficial scholars that many of the phenomena discovered by the higher criticism are simply repetitions of the blasphemies of Voltaire, Paine, and other eighteenth century skeptics.

Surely, "a lie which is half a truth is ever the blackest of lies."¹ The fact is that the objections to Christianity raised by these enemies of faith were based on real difficulties. For these perplexing phenomena, on account of which they denied the divine revelation, traditionalism had no answers save those which either wrested the Scriptures themselves or did violence to the human understanding; the historical and literary criticism, however, has thrown these into their proper perspective by the methods of scientific analysis, and so furnishes a natural explanation. So long as we confound the form with the substance of Christian teaching there is the endless obligation and the impossible task imposed upon the teachers of religion to defend every possible flaw in the earthen vessels which have conveyed to us the heavenly treasures. The modern method, which dares to dis-

¹ Tennyson, "The Grandmother."

criminate between the temporal and eternal in Holy Scripture, sweeps away at once the trivialities of a credulous dogmatism and the shallow sophistries of a superficial skepticism. The alleged "mistakes of Moses" collapse in a moment when placed in this larger light. We need no longer, ostrichlike, hide our heads in the sand and refuse to see the problems that have perplexed sincere souls as well as given weapons to dishonest denial and doubt. It is a divine discrimination which has taught us that the healing is not in the hem nor the robe of the Lord who wears it, but in himself, and that its living efficacy is not hindered by flaws in the weaving nor the dust on the hem which it has gathered along the road of the ages.

CRITICISM JUSTIFIED

Such have been some of the perils of the new criticism, and such the

splendid promise of the gains. Certainly there is nothing to warrant the hysterical condition into which some have fallen. The seeming condescension of superiority implied in the word "higher," the ignorant misuse of the word "criticism," as if it principally involved unfavorable judgments, and were merely finding flaws in the sacred writings, the hasty results of "freak" criticism in some radical quarters, the illegitimate confusion of philosophic with literary and historical criticism—these have discredited the careful work of devout scholarship among the unthinking. The minister, above all men, should set about the grateful task of reassuring troubled minds and burdened hearts. The fact is that the word "criticism," both by its etymological and in its scientific use, merely means discernment, discrimination, and judgment. To criticize the Bible is simply to do justice to it. The realm of criticism always begins

the moment we pass the bounds of personal experience. Things outside that realm are-brought into experience only by an act of judgment. It is the fundamental principle of Protestantism that religious belief is no exception to the rule governing truth in general. The right of private judgment is not a denial of authority, but the assertion that authority is only such by credentials which provoke the assent of the critical sense. All men who form any mental concepts or utter any form of propositional judgments employ the critical method. Some do it with the help of dogmatic presuppositions and *a priori* speculative theories, and so reach results tainted with personal bias; others begin by criticizing their own mental process, and reach their results with the help of scientific canons of evidence. When the beligerently orthodox Gilbert Chesterton notes that very valuable fact in our Lord's mental method, his frequent

use of the *a fortiori* appeal,¹ he is quite as truly a higher critic as is Wellhausen in disengaging the threefold strands of the life and legislation of Israel. We are all critics of some sort or other. To dispense with criticism is to be without judgment.

The science of biblical criticism, therefore, needs to be placed in its right light before the people, as the glorious consummation of the Protestant principle of soul-liberty as its religious ground, and of the grammatico-historical exegesis as its scientific ground. The ideas of the Reformation will continue to make their way in spite of bigots and obscurantists. In the meantime confessions remain to confuse us and hierarchies to harry us, and the one great papacy is giving way to countless little papacies with much less historical reason for being. Still a great, even an incalculable service was

¹ Orthodoxy, p. 272.

accomplished when the Bible took the place of the Church as objective authority in religion. For this is a great glory of Holy Scripture, that while a false misunderstanding of its relation to Him who alone is the truth may blind us to its highest worth, it will at last, if patiently studied and loyally trusted, render the high service of freeing us from bondage to its letter by imparting its own spirit of freedom. Without any need of defining the measure or mode of its inspiration, he who studies it with open mind and heart feels the truth of the free Spirit moving through it; every leaf of its forest of truth quivers with his power, and even the deadest branch of obsolete custom, crumbling chronicle, or sapless genealogys ways in the onward sweep of the wind of God. The vital principle of the Reformation remains to be worked out. That principle teaches the privacy of the relations of every individual soul to God, a privacy

sacred from the intervention of any outward thing, not to be defined by dogma nor mediated by ministering priest. The essence of religion is spiritual, and this inward liberty must be granted up to its farthest consequences.

THE PULPIT AND INTELLECTUAL LIBERTY

Preaching is possible as a living force only in an environment in which every mechanical device of confession and institution has been made mobile and fluid by the fusing fire of free thought. It is the appeal of person to person, of life to life, and demands a purely moral world in which authority takes the form of influence. A dogmatic pulpit is decadent in any period in which men realize their heritage of political, social, and spiritual liberty. The sermon is of little worth in a communion bound to the mechanism of sacramental grace, the

inflexible mold of confessionalism, or the absolutist thought forms of a rationalistic philosophy. It is highly significant that in that absurd cult which rivals Islam as a book-religion and arrogates the title of Christian Science, the sermon has been superseded by the written code, and the preacher has given place to the "reader." If Christian preaching is to survive the social and intellectual revolution of this age, it will be because of the new life given it by the free atmosphere of critical thought. Experimental religion has always handled Holy Scripture in this free way. Personal piety is always essentially pragmatic in its use of our whole heritage of institutions, doctrines, and records. This is the often forgotten secret of the sermon, that it seeks for immediate moral action rather than mere mental assent. The Church verifies Scripture by preaching and applying it. It was not by

any external proof of their canonicity or authenticity that the Epistles to the Romans and Galatians became a living word to the period of the Reformation, but the fact that they spoke to a need of the human conscience and won the response of a living trust in the saving Lord that they revealed. The truth of divine revelation upon the preacher's lips is not a proposition to be proved, or a doctrine to be discovered, but a Word to be done. His business is not to turn reality into abstractions of the intellect, but to be forever showing the life value of every revealing in God's word and works. Every true preacher is always consciously or unconsciously a critic, and follows a genetic method, presenting truths in the order in which they arise in personal experience. Anthropology, with its disclosure of human sin and religious needs, will always precede soteriology, and the rich revelation of

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the triune God will be the crown rather than the commencement of his teaching. Preaching stands solitary among all rhetorical performances and human acts, as a voice out of the eternal verities spoken in the ears of time. This note of immediacy in the message of the preacher must always rest upon that in Scripture which is self-evidencing and not upon anything laboriously established by external credentials.

AUTHORITY AND INSPIRATION

How, then, can the Bible be used as an authoritative norm in Christian teaching? This question is the very crux of the relation of criticism to preaching. Yet the answer is simple enough. Religion knows that God is revealed in the Bible; criticism has nothing to do with that fact, but only with the method by which the record of many and progressive revelations has been transmitted to us. "Every

How?" says Aristotle, "rests on a What?" The fact of revelation is primary and makes a direct appeal to the religious consciousness; the method of revelation is secondary and can be discovered only by means of critical investigation. Indeed, the words "authority," "inerrancy," "infallibility," and the like, are words of dispute which usually would be better left alone by the preacher. If back of his message he feels the force of the thing itself, he can neglect the ambiguous names that men have given it. For the Holy Book and the minister's message are alike in this, that they have supremely the authority which they can win in their own right and not that which is given by any traditional theory or external credentials.

It is evident that the extra-confessional doctrine of verbal inspiration, with its implication of inerrancy in all sorts of statements, involving an au-

thority applied *ab extra* to the human understanding and conscience, is a piece of intellectual immorality; and more, it is actual rationalism—an enthronement of the human reason above the moral nature of both man and God.¹ Without support in the Book itself, without any deep root in Christian antiquity or any warrant in the principles of the reformers, it was a very human device of the Protestant schoolmen of the seventeenth century to substitute the Book for the Church as an objective authority for the delivery of dogma. These scholastics succeeded in rejecting the actual Bible which Luther had liberated and Calvin had expounded, by casting it into their confessional molds. One high service of criticism is the recovery of the real Bible. If great names are worth anything to the Church, if there is any element of authority in

¹ It might be well for our generation to reread Bishop Butler's great chapter in the *Analogy*, "of our incapacity for judging what were to be expected in a Revelation."

high spiritual leadership or profound and devout scholarship, there is an unspeakable absurdity in our trying to see the Book of books through the spectacles of a lot of second-class men whose very names are mostly forgotten. Their teaching gave rise to the deadest preaching the Church has known in any age, save that of mediæval monkery, and has everywhere ended in a spiritual dearth only less disastrous than that caused by Roman error. This mechanical theory of Holy Scripture, which has tried to fasten upon the Church the traditional dating and authorship of the sacred documents, is not itself a true, but a bastard tradition without the sanction of antiquity or the support of ecclesiastical authority. No branch of the Christian Church, not even the seventeenth century confessions themselves (excepting a single Swiss formulary), has ever made the inerrancy in detail of the Bible an article of faith.

The fact just noted is of great significance; especially is it so to the preacher. He is not bound by any creed subscription to any theory of the composition of the sacred books which sets a limit on the most searching investigation of their problems and the freest handling of their contents for the purposes of religious edification. If ever there has been that "inspiration of superintendence" of which dogmatists talk so knowingly, surely, it is in this significant fact, that the Holy Spirit in guiding the Church into all truth has kept it from ever decreeing as doctrine a theory of the Scriptures which would have inevitably left them liable to the destroying touch of time and advancing knowledge. Surely, the prudence of the Church in this regard has not been without the leadership of the Paraclete promised by our Lord. He it is who has inspired the freedom of scholarship and the courage of the

preacher. "Where the spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty," and there too the veil falls from the face of Holy Writ, and men see with open vision the Lord himself.¹

There are two rationalisms neither of which must be allowed to invade the pulpit. One is the rationalism of criticism, that mighty Nimrod against the Lord, the beginning and ending of whose kingdom is a very Babel of confusion; the other is even more subtly dangerous—the theological rationalism which forms an *a priori* theory of what would be a worthy revelation of God and then tries to force the Bible into the mold of its definition, instead of reverently asking what sort of revelation has God, in fact, given us? We have no right to dictate on what mountaintops of history or life God has distilled, or through what channels he has gathered the streams which at last formed

¹ 2 Cor. 4. 15-17.

this river of life. The sermon cannot command the ways of the Spirit. This "wind bloweth where it listeth." The trim tape line of our logic shall never fathom the depths of life's great sea. We must avoid, on the one hand, the scientific fallacy of the genetic method that assumes that we have explained anything though we may have described everything, and the theological fallacy of absolutism that you can discover a set of formulas that account for all things. Scientific truth alike in the physical and spiritual realm is not a fixed quantum that can be measured, but a moving function of partly known reality, needing perpetual re-statement with widening vision. It is not a land-locked pond, but a flowing river. Dogma is frozen truth. Ice is easier to handle than water, but has to be turned back into water before it can be used. There is a machine type of mind that prefers to skate on the ice rather than to plunge into the

flood of religious reality; skating is easier and safer for most folks than swimming. Such men make excellent priests with their cold-storage system for the preservation of the past; they are not the prophets who see, and by seeing help to shape God's to-morrow.¹

That preacher will have a better Bible whom the critical process has enabled to discriminate between the transient and permanent elements in sacred literature, between the Book and the divine revelation which it incloses, for the preacher belongs to that same holy economy that produced the Bible. He is in the succession of patriarchs, prophets, and apostles who spoke as they were wrought upon by the Holy Spirit. 'Revelation existed millenniums before Moses, David, Isaiah, or Paul, and it lived in their lives before they wrote a sin-

¹ On the whole subject of theological rationalism and the intellectual disease of dogmatism, see the very instructive discussion in F. C. S. Schiller's "Formal Logic: A Scientific and Social Problem," pp. 400-405.

gle word. It is a record of religious experiences of abiding moral and spiritual reality, which men won from contact with the living God. It is a concentration of the stored spiritual testimony of the race, found at its highest in the holy fellowship we call the Church, and in the Church found at its highest in that Book in which the princes of the heavenly kingdom have left their record of what God did in and by them. The spiritual life is propagated by the personal witness, and the Bible contains that witness in its loftiest literary expression. It enables us to follow the divine Spirit in the spiritual evolution of the race. It is more than a text-book for the minister; it is a treasury of inexhaustible spiritual material.

DIVINE AND HUMAN

Revelation is divine; its record is human. The Bible is divine-human, like its Lord. As he wore the swad-

dling-bands of a Jewish babe, was incarnate in human flesh, and grew in the stature and wisdom of a truly human development, so does the revelation of God embody itself in human speech, submit to the bondage of earthly form of thought and experience and grow with the growth of the race in its capacity to receive and reveal God. To deny the human element in the Bible is a sort of literary Docetism like that early and deadly heresy that rejected the humanity of Christ. Its outward form, like his, is subject to weariness, wasting, and death. In our holiest moments we must refuse to know either the eternal Word or the written Word after the flesh. We must affirm its humanness to go beyond it. We must, indeed, in deference to our understanding, come to the Bible as to any other book, but we can never leave it with that thought. It wears human and historical forms, and is not im-

mune in that form to the limitations imposed by it, but is still most divine where most warmly human. For the supernatural ever works through and by the natural. All elements in the Bible are not of equal value for religious edification. The life in the human body has as truly created the hair upon the head as the brain within it, but one can more easily dispense with the hair than with the brain. Criticism may destroy many of the accidents; it cannot touch the substance of divine revelation. Not one of the staple tenets of religion is affected by its processes, but all are disengaged by it and disencumbered of their earthly dress.

What authority, it is asked, remains in a book in which it is admitted there may be possible errors and earthly imperfections? The answer is not far to seek: it has just that authority which it needs to do its work, and that is all the authority which the

pulpit can appropriate or use. That which is truly divine in the Book, its religious content, is *there*, and not in our theory of it. Its authority does not consist in itself, but in the sort of response it awakens in the soul. This is the only certainty that can carry conviction, the inward assurance created by the direct vision of truth. Revelation does not need authority; it confers it. Its messages are commands that are at home in the realm of motive and directly appeal to the will. That sermon is best which has this element of vision and immediacy and whose simple statement is its own best proof.

The sort of infallibility claimed for the Bible on traditional theories does not make its religious worth. There is a fine phrase attributed to Cardinal Baronius: "The Bible was given us, not to teach us how the heavens go, but to tell us how to go to heaven."¹

¹ Quoted in Guizot's *Meditations*.

The books of Samuel and of Chronicles differ widely in the number of shekels given by David to Araunah in payment for his oxen and the site of the temple.¹ What does it matter? We are not specially interested in the quotations of live stock or the price of real estate in Jerusalem at that remote date. No question of duty or destiny hangs upon such facts, but there is eternal worth in the kingly protest of David, "I will not offer unto the Lord that which doth cost me nothing." We must learn to respect the reserve of revelation, in that it does not furnish ready-made answers for the questions raised by scientific or historical curiosity. It has indeed immense value as a historical source; it does supply a wealth of information in a thousand different directions; but in such matters it is subject to the question of criticism and may be corrected by investigation. Its

¹ 2 Sam. 24. 24; 1 Chron. 21. 25.

supreme worth, and that which vindicates its claim to inspiration, is that it is "able to make us wise unto salvation." The locomotive headlight shows little of the landscape to the passengers, but it does light up the track before the engineer. Everything in Holy Scripture is subordinate to the divine revelation it incloses. Its history, archæology, geography, literature all have their interest to the Christian student, but he dare not rest his religious hope on such things. The preacher cannot make this earthly element the subject of his sermons. His message is found in those moral and spiritual magnitudes which the book discloses, which have an absolute worth in themselves, constituting their authority to every moral being. Bones are necessary to the structure of a shad, and are immensely interesting to the student of anatomy, but only the sweet flesh is nourishing to a hungry man.

Criticism has not only helped to define authority in this truly Protestant and spiritual sense, but it has also emphasized this authoritative element. That the historical books of the Old Testament are what is called pragmatic history has often been used by radical critics as an excuse for drawing inferences unfavorable to their veracity. That is for the most part pure assumption. But if the golden mist of religious meaning through which the chroniclers saw the story of Israel did dim some of its outlines, it also acted as a lens to magnify its deeper spiritual truths. When we see in the Old Testament the culminating religious consciousness of Israel, reading all its past in the moral light of the prophetic teaching and legal discipline, gathering in one sheaf its songs, traditions, laws, and literature, and illuminating and interpreting all these by the radiant glory of its highest spiritual achievement, it gains new

life and value. The inspiration passes back of the book into the history itself. "Thus *said* the Lord" yields in significance to "Thus *did* the Lord." God, and not man, is seen to be the supreme actor in the affairs of this world. This point of view is of infinite value to the preacher. His duty is to proclaim that the religious view of the world is as valid as the scientific view, and in the end immeasurably more true, because inclosing more of the facts of life. Pragmatic, or, as Father Tyrrell calls it, prophetic history,¹ is truest to the deep heart of things. \ He who can see in the stories of Balaam's ass and of Jonah and the fish nothing but queer natural history has missed the meaning of the gracious message. Just because the Hebrew mind saw truth concretely and expressed it in symbols rather than propositions, it was fitted to be the medium to convey the truths of life

¹ Through Scylla and Charybdis, chap. IX.

and conduct, even as the Greek intellect with its love of abstractions was adapted to be the vehicle of scientific statement. The minister must learn to interpret Holy Scripture along the line of its own genius, and not allow its truth to be dominated or manipulated by the dogmatic passion for propositional truth. Even those pre-scientific answers of cosmogonic questions found in the first chapters of Genesis reveal the relation of God to his world as it could never be discovered in the laboratory or the observatory. These are the "truths that perish never."

And so the Bible becomes not apart from, but one with all God's dealings with the world. We no longer see his only revealing act in the dictation of a book. Revelation is not confined to Hebrew channels, although it was there that its rushing tides made deepest grooves in the rocks of time. It has served its purpose when it has

given us its own vision of the living God. The preacher, to make this use of the sacred Book, must have caught its spirit and come to see all history, nature, and life as revelation.

I see the inundation sweet,
I hear the spending of the stream,
Through years, through men, through nature
fleet,
Through love and thought, through power
and dream.¹

Its authority is pedagogic; it will succeed so far as it teaches men to look beyond itself and causes them to cry, "Now we believe, not because of thy saying, for we have heard Him ourselves."²

It cannot be too often insisted upon that reality does not depend upon our construction of it. Facts are facts, and are not made or unmade by science. The stars shine on the same, even if astrology has given place to

¹ Emerson, "Two Rivers."

² John 4. 42.

astronomy; their brightness does not depend upon any theory of their motion or their influence. The rings of Saturn are as glorious as ever, even if disintegrating criticism should show them to be composed of meteorites. That which is truly divine in the Bible is just the part which criticism cannot disturb, and its sacredness is the more completely attested by that very fact. There is a deep in the Holy Scriptures which speaks to the deep in the heart of man, and the diapason of its majestic music will speak all the more clearly when we no longer allow our ears to be distracted by the washing of the ripple on the surface or the cry of the lonely seabird above the waves. Practical ends survive the shock of changed doctrine. Bread will continue to nourish even when bacteriology has developed a new theory of yeast. Doubtless an age that knows chemistry will produce better bread than

the age of scientific ignorance; but the preacher is a dealer in the bread of life and not a chemist who inquires into its scientific structure.

THE HIGHEST CRITICISM

Beyond the higher criticism there is a highest criticism, based not on the canons of evidence, but on spiritual insight. The supreme agent in the interpretation of Scripture is the Holy Spirit. Inspiration has to do, not with information, but with insight, not with historicity or science, but with those spiritual things which are spiritually criticized or discerned. The preacher must rise from the professionalism of the priest to the power of the pulpit, by this discrimination of spiritual values. It is noteworthy that in the great Protestant confessions this witness of the Spirit has always been made an essential part of the doctrine of Sacred Scripture. Thus the noble symbol of Westminster tes-

tifies: "Our full persuasion of the infallible truth and divine authority thereof is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit, bearing witness by and with the word in our heart."¹ So the older Scotch confession quaintly says that, in Scripture, the "true Kirk alwaies heares and obeys the voice of her awin spouse and pastor."² This is the doctrine of Calvin, who affirms of Scripture that "it is self-authenticated, carrying with it its own evidence, and ought not to be made the subject of demonstration and arguments from reason, but *it obtains the credit that it deserves with us by the testimony of the Spirit.*"³

The Church has always placed experience first and scientific knowledge afterward. Its maxim has ever been *Credo ut intelligam*. And contrariwise, all formulas that cannot be translated into terms of experience are to the

¹ Confession, I, §5.

² Ant., 19.

³ Institutes, I, Chap. VII, 5.

religious sense negligible. There is a preparation for preaching more fundamental than the preparation of the sermon—it is the preparation of the preacher. No man can really preach that as the Word of God which has not been such to himself. He cannot interpret Moses until for him earth's trees have been aflame with the divine presence; he cannot explain Isaiah until his own lips have felt the cleansing touch of the live coal from the upper sanctuary; he cannot preach Paul's gospel until God has revealed his Son in him as in the great apostle to the Gentiles.

O could I tell, you surely would believe it!

O could I only say what I have seen!

How could I tell, or how can you receive it,

How, till He bringeth you where I have
been?

Therefore, O Lord, I will not fail nor falter;

Nay, but I ask it, nay, but I desire;

Lay on my lips the embers of the altar,

Seal with the sting and furnish with the fire.

Quick, in a moment, infinite forever,
Send an arousal better than I pray;
Give me a grace upon the faint endeavor,
Souls for my hire and Pentecost to-day!¹

It was this highest criticism that our Lord and his servant Paul brought to the teaching of the Old Testament. It is the hallowing of criticism which alone can make the new learning, or any learning, safe to the preacher. It would be but empty erudition to discover the exilic date of the latter chapters of Isaiah and then to miss the deeper meaning given by this new historic setting of these words of consolation, the very loftiest mountain-peak of prophecy. To find that Babylonian cosmogonic myths have furnished the symbolic language for apocalyptic literature, or that Persian dreams of angelic hierarchies, judgment, world restoration, and resurrection have shaped the later beliefs of Israel, would be but idle pedantry

¹ F. W. H. Myers, "Saint Paul."

to any preacher who had not also the insight to see that it is the spiritual genius of the chosen people and their experience of God which has shaped from all these fragments of alien culture something which Babylon never built and Persia never could have produced. It is by this highest criticism that the Church has determined the canon of Scripture. It has not been wholly, or even chiefly, by the will of man acting on traditional evidence, but by a divine discernment, born of spiritual sympathy, that these books have survived; it has been a conservation of supreme values. The Bible lives by being lived.

“The sword of the Spirit is the word of God.” It is spiritual truth alone that can slay sin and save souls. It is not by syllogisms or argument that men can be won to Christianity. When the promised Paraclete cometh “he shall convince the world.” The preacher might well despair if he were

sent to work without this weapon, if he were expected to conquer by logical proofs. It is by the "unction of the Holy One" that the divine knowledge comes.¹ The Church lives in a present world of religious reality, a kingdom in which the risen Lord reigns and the Spirit administers. God is his own interpreter. Inspiration is no outworn and isolated fact; the divine message in the book is attested by the indwelling Spirit in the life of the believer. We can believe in a Bible that leads us to God; we could not vitally believe in a God who referred us to a book. "The kingdom of God is not in word, but in power."

THE PURPOSE OF PREACHING

The purpose of preaching is to secure that response to the gospel which we call saving faith. Now, this faith is not the acceptance of laboriously certified credentials or acquiescence in

¹ 1 John 2. 20.

any form of words, but an act of trust in a living Person. Biblical faith is something more than faith in the Bible.¹ Belief in the Bible is one thing, and may lead to all sorts of opinions, sensible and absurd; the living faith inspired by the Bible is quite another thing, for it is a present experience of saving grace and power. As Principal Forsyth has well said: "We shall not be judged by what we thought of the Bible, but by what we did with its gospel; not by what we know of the Bible, but by the way it made us realize we were known of God. We shall be rich, not by the ore, but by the gold."² That pulpit which the cleansing fire of criticism has driven from the outworks of the letter to the stronghold of the spirit, and which has won the glad, confident note of a personal experience of eternal reality born of the self-evidencing

¹ See the interesting discussions in Menegoz's *Le Fideisme*, Nos. 11 and 37.

² *Hibbert Journal*, Oct., 1911, p. 250.

power of the truth of God, will speak with fresh energy, for its message will be "words which the Holy Spirit teaches," and will be accompanied with an abiding demonstration and power, ministered by the Spirit of God.

It is not in a Book, but in a living Being, that God is supremely revealed. The only possible disclosure of a personal God is in a divine Person. To preach the Word is to preach Christ. Jesus reproaches the Jews with their mistaken reverence for and study of the Scriptures, and their unfounded belief that they could find eternal life in written documents, and condemns them for refusing to come to him for life. "These are they which testify of me."¹ He declines the faith that is built on externals, that demands miracles, and he will not allow even the Scriptures to be his rival. That preaching is best

¹ John 5. 39 (Authorized Version).

which brings the soul face to face with a living and present Lord; the men of to-day must receive the grace of God as the apostles did—directly from him. There is but one final authority for the Christian faith: it is the historic Jesus, who is the present Christ. The one point at which the spiritual and historical coincide is “Christ in us the hope of glory.” No higher service can be rendered by a ministry which has been instructed by the critical method, than to bring back the faith of the Church to its one unshaken ground of certainty. Faith has its citadel, which is Jesus Christ, and they who construct other frail fortresses of human theory and opinion, and insist that the perpetuity of the Christian system is involved in the defense of these crazy structures of human tradition, ignore what is the true defense and glory of our Christianity. The preaching of the cross is still the power of God to us which are

saved. The modern preacher, like Paul, finds himself confronted by the Jews who require a sign and the Greeks who seek wisdom,¹ represented to-day in the traditionalists who demand the unnatural and abnormal, and the rationalists who would substitute criticism for faith. But to them that are called, Christ is still both the miracle and the method of God. "God has spoken!" So writes the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews. He spoke in times past in fragmentary and varied ways by the prophets, but in these last days by a Son.² This is the word of faith which we preach.

I have a life in Christ to live;
But ere I live it must I wait
Till learning can clear answer give
Of this or that book's date?

I have a life in Christ to live,
I have a death in Christ to die;
And must I wait till science give
All doubts a full reply?³

¹ 1 Cor. 1. 22, 24.

² Heb. 1. 1, 2.

³ John Campbell Shairp.

Surely not, for he is his own answer to all questions about him. Truth, dead in the tomb of dogma, has sprung into life at the question of criticism. Through all the clouds of controversy there shines the face of the living Lord.

THE NEED OF THE MINISTRY

The situation suggests the need of a more strenuous scholarship on the part of the ministry. The preacher will not be a worse Christian nor a poorer preacher for knowing something about the Bible. Criticism has placed the emphasis on biblical rather than systematic theology, and the hunger for the Word of God can be satisfied only by a pulpit which is "mighty in the Scriptures." Biblical exposition must largely take the place of those academic essays in homiletics which are called topical sermons. The health of the Church calls for fruit freshly gathered in the garden of God rather than for canned goods

from the theological pantry-shelf. Such preaching will be based in a sound exegesis, and true exegesis is critical; that is, it applies the canons of literary and historical judgment to the interpretation of the text. Spiritual insight is more than grammatical knowledge, but it cannot dispense with grammar; mere piety may miss many a precious lesson through ignorance. The Puritan pulpit, often considered the most narrowly dogmatic, furnishes one great name which is both inspiration and example. Our time needs a Baxter, who to profound learning and deep experimental piety joined unflinching courage, uncompromising veracity, and transparent sincerity. The prophet and the scribe, the schoolman and the saint, the preacher and the teacher will meet in this mighty ministry.

All preachers cannot be critics, but they all can and should win the temper of mind which reveres knowl-

edge and appropriates its wealth. We can cease basing our faith on untenable grounds and defending it with perilous weapons. We can guard against the seductions of silence that dodges the difficulties besetting souls and hides in a coward's castle of safety, rather than dares to conserve the truth by its courageous use; we must not with impudent hypocrisy dare to "offer to the God of truth the unclean sacrifice of a lie";¹ we will not exalt fidelity to form and confessional conformity above inward spirituality and outward holiness. It is possible to be as doctrinally orthodox as the Pharisees and ecclesiastically correct as the Sadducees, and still send Christ to the cross. We must not eternally raise the cry of "Wolf!" to whistle the dogs and stampe the sheep at the approach of mental difficulties to faith, and raise no cry of alarm at the darker dangers

¹ Bacon.

of wickedness and worldliness. We may learn to recognize in the living question of an active mind something more akin to a saving faith than can be found in the dead answers of a sluggish spirit. Above all, the preacher of to-day, as of every age, must learn to live first-hand from God; and only as that special experience of divine love and power we call salvation arises and is reproduced in his own heart, can he either receive the revelation from the holy Book or preach it to sinful souls.

No higher service can be rendered by the minister in this critical crisis for the Church than to utilize it in arousing a new interest in Bible study. When the Book was looked upon as inerrant it frequently became too sacred for use; it was banished from the study of the parlor table; it became a magic talisman whose presence in the house exuded safety and sanctity quite apart from its contents. The

quickenings of the historic spirit in modern thought ought to awaken a revival of interest in the Book of God. Such renewed study has always been the signal of spiritual revival. Before the invention of printing the rare copies of Holy Scriptures were chained to the reading desks of the churches. A vicious theory of its composition has again chained it to confessional systems. Criticism is again unchaining the real revelation of God found in the sacred records. The liberated Book, once a priest's book, then the preacher's book, now the professor's book, must become the people's book. Give the Bible a chance to speak for itself, and it will arouse a religious response which will be the real remedy for the peril and shock caused by radical criticism. The Church which emulates the Berean nobleness which "received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily,"¹

¹ Acts 17. 11.

will win a knowledge which will with open mind welcome all new light breaking forth from the Book, and a faith that cannot be shaken by the changing forms of that knowledge.

RESULTS TO THE CHURCH AND INDIVIDUAL

Such preaching and teaching will raise the Church above the clouds of controversy and sectarian bigotry. Sectarianism is largely born of the piecemeal use of Scripture. Men go into this orchard of fruit, not to gather fruit to feed their hunger, but to cut clubs to break each other's heads. To catch a glimpse of the progressive character of divine revelation, to feel the onwardness of its movement, and to discriminate the fragmentary sources from the abiding religious element, is to be delivered from the vicious proof-text method of handling Scripture. Who has not felt when encountering a crowd of these

excerpts from the sacred Book, collected in a cloud to support some doctrine, that they were much like that flight of Scythian arrows that darkened the sky rather than wounded the enemy? This result of the critical method is already in sight—a consensus, not only of critical conclusions, but of exegetical results. Unity is being reached through the labor of devout scholarship. The convergence of critical conclusions toward a common result is most remarkable. That unity which neither an infallible Church nor an infallible Book could ever give, will be conquered by the Church that is simply loyal to truth. One day the stones quarried in many a mountain of research will be found to fit into their places in the one temple of God. The preachers of to-morrow will be found preaching, not many gospels, but one Christ.

Yet this unity will be revealed in a richer diversity than we ever dreamed.

- When the Bible is enfranchised from its irreverent abuse as a theological text-book and is no longer regarded as a formal didactic treatise made up of logical propositions and doctrinal definitions, and it is seen to be as free and spontaneous as nature itself, preaching will become more rich and varied. Its wealth of literary form, its appropriation and assimilation of the whole life of the ancient world, its inclusion of many climes and times in its testimony for God—the recognition of these and similar elements will give to preaching an opulence of material which no narrow dogmatism could command. It will mean much to the preacher to overcome that Chinese vision which sees no perspective. He will learn to preach as Jesus did, not by turning the rich variety of Scripture into jejune forms of logical statement, as men extract vinegar from the luscious fruits of the orchard and vineyard, but by dropping holy pictures

into their minds, that the sensitive soul may win its own vision and achieve its own thought of God. It is a nobler task to stir a life to shape its own spiritual response and form its own moral reactions than to dose a soul with truth of the tabloid type. Some one has said, "Science is in *us*, religion is in *me*"; that is, science is a social product, religion is an individual experience. Criticism will realize that ideal for us, a unity of intellectual result joined to a rich diversity of personal expression. The way of faith has been made intellectually hard by the confusion of creeds and confessions, and morally too easy; it needs to be made simple to the mind, but morally strenuous to the will. "*Securus judicat orbis terrarum*," "the whole world cannot go wrong"—such was the plea of Augustine for the unity of the Church. A more vital oneness than he could have imagined will be wrought when, by the destruc-

tion of the earthly scaffolding about the truth of God, the divine temple wrought of living human stones shall stand in its consummate beauty. True preaching, which is simply bringing religious truth to the test of life, will certainly make the discovery that not one thing that has value for living has been lost by any possible critical process. No assault of logic can possibly capture that citadel of Christian certainty whose foundations are in the holy mountains of spiritual fact.

Criticism may compel the preacher to condense his creed; it does not demand that he dilute it. Let no young minister imagine that flippant flings at vicarious atonement or audacious dealing with the divinity of our Lord establishes him as critical in his methods or progressive in his spirit. These are

No dead facts stranded on the shore
Of the oblivious years,¹

¹J. G. Whittier, "Our Master."

but truths tested in the laboratory of human experience. "Jesus Christ and him crucified" is the very heart of that religious reality whose testimony made the New Testament and built the Church. Let no one dream that any criticism, either of the record or of the institution, can touch the facts that created both. The preacher who has lost the light of these truths from his mind and their power from his life has lost his message and should vacate his office.

The lower, or textual, criticism has compelled revision of our versions of Holy Scripture. The higher criticism should bring about still another version, the translation of divine revelation, not into letters, but into life. This version will not be made by the professor, but by the preacher. The Bible will then be no longer the "dear old Book," but the youngest and most contemporaneous of all books, with the dew of the morning upon it, the sweet-

ness of the springtime in its messages, and the angel of the resurrection forever rolling the stone away from the perpetual new birth of its meaning. Revelation must be transferred from the past to the present tense. Our Holy Land must be all about us. Only an inspired volume can stand such a translation. Paul has taught us that the ministry of the New Testament is just this lifting the veil from the ancient testimony, that the message graven in stone shall be fulfilled and superseded by the living epistle written in hearts by the Holy Spirit and read by all men in holy lives.¹ A prophetic ministry will give us an eternal gospel and make all men contemporary with the saving facts of Christianity. Nothing but these living Bibles of human lives can fully vindicate the Bible of our fathers.

¹ 2 Cor. 3. 2, 3.

CONCLUSION

Times of transition in thought are indeed times of trial to the Church and of testing to its teaching. They involve great peril to much that is held precious, but they also hold great promise. We were horrified at the excisions made in the vineyard by the pruning-knife, but the purple clusters of autumn vindicated the method. The Church has always been most aggressively active in the days of doctrinal and institutional reconstruction. In vineyard and orchard the fruit always grows on the new wood. All the swiftest advances, both in material and moral progress, are made in analytic rather than synthetic periods. The heretics of to-day are very often the prophets of to-morrow. The noblest discoveries of power have always been made by the men who bravely broke with tradition in loyalty to truth. The ways of the Spirit are never static, but always dynamic. It

is in such times that the creative Spirit of God is moving on the face of the waters and commanding from the chaos of our confused thinking the apparition of a new heaven and a new earth.

I looked: aside the dust-cloud rolled,
The Waster seemed the builder too;
Upspringing from the ruined Old,
I saw the New.

'Twas but the ruin of the bad—
The wasting of the wrong and ill;
Whate'er of good the old time had
Was living still.

.
Take heart! the Waster builds again—
A charmèd life old Goodness hath;
The tares may perish, but the grain
Is not for death.¹

Surely, such a time should see a renascence of the divine art of preaching. Certainly, the sermon does not to-day hold a high place in popular esteem. Some phases of church life

¹ J. G. Whittier, "The Reformer."

have doubtless assisted in this decadence of the pulpit. The complicated social and secular organization of the modern church often seeks for pastor a man of the "promoter" type, the skillful organizer and strong executive. Another type of congregation calls for a gentlemanly usher, cleverly adroit in all the etiquette of the sanctuary and of society. There is great danger that such a ministry will cease to be a Voice. The preacher who surrenders to any secular theory of his calling will soon become a mere phonograph to parrotlike repeat a set of conventional opinions. He will preach what he is expected to preach. Like the parson described in Tennyson's "Northern Farmer,"

I 'eered 'um a bummin awaäy like a buzzard
clock ower my 'eäd....

An' I thowt a said whot a 'owt to a' said, an
I coomed awaäy.

He is like a barrel organ on whose

cylinder are pegged out a few tunes born of homiletic tradition. Give such a man a new conception of the Bible, let him feel it throbbing with human life and thrilling with a divine message, let its message become no archaic deposit carefully handed down from generation to generation, but a living experience wrought in his own soul, and he may become like the great church organ with its countless stops and keys, through which the whole world of holy harmony and melody sleeping in the air of history and life can be expressed. The preacher of to-morrow must be a true prophet of God, translating the common life of the world into the terms of the Spirit; he will be an inspired herald of the kingdom of heaven upon earth.

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